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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3090
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 6186
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2238
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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SUBJECT: LIFTING THE BAN ON POLITICAL MEETINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Surayud told the press today that the interim government would recommend the lifting of the chief restriction on civil liberties, the prohibition on political gatherings of five or more people. A very well-connected political insider, Prasong Sunsiri, told us the same thing today, and predicted that there would be an official announcement within a couple of days. According to both accounts, the government will propose lifting the restriction to the Council for National Security (CNS), and, once they are in agreement, will propose that the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) give its endorsement.

¶2. (C) The government is not proposing that martial law be lifted at this time. During the coup on 19 September, the coup makers issued a series of announcements or edicts (most of which are OBE now that the interim government and constitution are in place). However, the interim constitution specifies that all these announcements and orders shall continue to be in force. This includes Announcement No. 7, which states that, "political gatherings or meetings of five people or more, wherever they may take place, are prohibited." This is the prohibition that the PM is proposing to lift. Since it affects national security, the CNS must be consulted, and since the constitution says that all these edicts remain in force, the NLA needs to endorse the amendment or lifting of the restriction. The NLA will convene for a ceremonial opening on Friday, October 20, and will have its first working session on October 24, which would therefore be the earliest that this restriction could be lifted. Surayud said that the lifting of this restriction would also permit political parties to meet, but said that they should do so in a "constructive fashion." Foreign Minister Nitya called the Ambassador later in the day to explain that the government was restoring the right to assemble and conduct political activity; however, they would still limit the ability to assemble "in public places" for the time being.

¶3. (C) Comment: Political parties and NGOs have consistently identified this restriction on political meetings as the most important limit on their civil liberties and political involvement. Lifting this restriction is an overdue and important step, which would give the political parties and

the NGOs back the ability to participate in normal political life. We will be examining the remaining martial law provisions to determine what, if any, effect they have on political activity, and will encourage the government to move quickly to lift any remaining restrictions. Permitting political meetings, however, will be a good move in the right direction.

BOYCE